

CLOUTreach

The Quarterly Newsletter for Christian Lesbians OUT Together

Whore-ishly Implementing the Political Vision of the Christ-Sophia presented to the International CLOUT Gathering, SUNY Brockport, August 1995 by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Most of us no doubt remember that Jesus of Nazareth was repeatedly accused of receiving sinners and eating with them. As a matter of fact, according to Luke 15, it was precisely that accusation that launched Jesus on his three stories of God as a female or male shepherd seeking and finding that one lost sheep, God as a female homeowner finding her one lost coin, and God as an unconditionally loving father welcoming home his disreputable son. And wherever Jesus traveled or ate, women were present with him, many of them unmarried, some of them providing financial support for the disciples. What I had not known until recently was that during Jesus' place and time, all women were defined as whores or prostitutes if they were living outside of what was considered "appropriate male control."¹ Therefore, my sisters, we lesbians (or bisexual women living in same-sex relationships) may see ourselves included in that First-Century category of women who have evaded male control. We are the whores of Jesus the Christ-Sophia's place and time; and Jesus received us, depended upon our assistance, and broke bread with us.

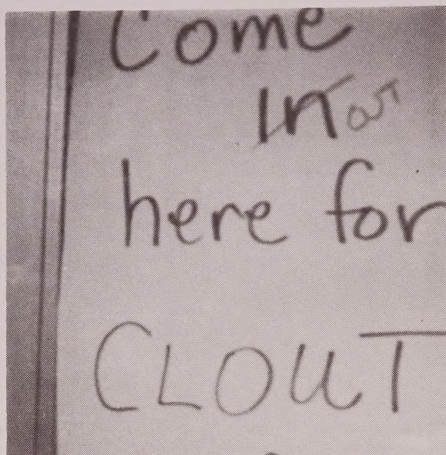
Let us consider for a moment one of the many reasons we may with perfect Christian orthodoxy refer to Jesus as the Sophia-Christ or the Christ-Sophia. Jesus as the minister and/or the embodiment of God's wisdom (*hokmah* in Hebrew, *sophia* in Greek, both feminine gender) was the predominant image of the Christ in the First-Century Christian church, as witness the many references in Paul and the Gospels to Jesus as the wisdom (*sophia*) of God.² During the Second and Third Centuries, the image of the Christ as Sophia co-existed with the Stoic image of the Logos, Christ as the deeper reason or meaning of the universe. Church leaders like Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria used gynocentric images of Christ-as-Sophia and androcentric images of Christ-as-Logos in pairings that gave the impression of Christ as androgynous. But in the Fourth Century, when Christianity became the Establishment religion, and after the Council of Nicea, imagery of Christ Jesus as God's only begotten Son displaced both Christ-as-Sophia and Christ-as-Logos to become the one non-negotiable image of Jesus. Because Jesus was male and also God's Son, the assumption was made that if the Second Person of the Trinity is male and is the

perfect image of God, then the First Person must also be male. Hence Christianity was off and running with the obsessive use of the metaphor of God as Father, a metaphor that has caused many people to imagine that males are gods. The almost-exclusive use of the Father metaphor and the reasoning underlying it provide an example of misplaced particularization: if Jesus' human particularities literally describe God, then God is not only male, but Jewish, young, working-class, and bisexual. (I assume that Jesus was bisexual because of the descriptions of Jesus' intimacy with the male "disciple whom Jesus loved" and also with Mary Magdalene in the canonical and apocryphal gospels.)

Church historian Virginia Burrus describes Christianity's Fourth-Century Re-Imagining this way: there was a figurative automobile accident in which Sophia and Logos imagery were run over by Sonship imagery: "Sophia was killed and Logos was wounded."³ It was the total eclipse of Sophia by Sonship that made possible our contemporary ignorance of the Wisdom Trajectory, so that the Right Wing folks could get away with



Virginia Ramey Mollenkott



A sign of the times.

accusing the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference of “worshipping a pagan goddess named Sophia.”

Turning now to the political vision of Jesus the Christ-Sophia: Jesus told a parable about a person who made a feast, and because many of the invited guests sent their regrets, the host sent out his servants to bring to the table anybody they could find. Luke’s version says bring in the *outcasts*; Matthew says bring in *both good and bad people*; the Gospel of Thomas says simply bring back *whomever you can find*.⁴ Imagine the motley mix who would have eaten together at that feast: women next to men at a time when such mixing was considered disgusting; free people next to slaves; ritually pure next to ritually impure; elegantly respectable people being jostled by “disreputables” with no table manners whatsoever; “whores” next to wives of distinguished husbands.

In their book on the anthropology of eating, Peter Farb and George Armelagos point out that in all societies, “eating is the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships. . . . To know what, where, when, and with whom people eat is to know the character of their society.”⁵ So: what kind of society was Jesus depicting as the kingdom [“g” dropped on purpose!, —ed.] of She Who Is, the realm of Sophia-God? Jesus depicted a non-discriminatory table, an anticulture, a radically egalitarian society that jells together all races, all classes, all sexualities, all genders, and all gender-benders.

And since most people in Mediterranean society saw themselves as honorable only when they were admired by others whom *they* considered honorable,⁶ the idea of living in Jesus’ hodgepodge lodge seemed irrational, absurd, without honor, full of shame.⁷ But to those who demeaned him for his radical egalitarianism, Jesus merely replied, “Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Matt. 11:19, NRSV). Sublimely undisturbed by

identifying himself with the female personification of God as Wisdom and applying to himself a gynocentric pronoun, Jesus said that a radically egalitarian discipleship of equals is what a Sophia-Christian society looks like. It seems to me that by his words and actions, Jesus gave us CLOUT sisters our mission: as Jesus’ “Whorish” disciples, our job is to get out there in the highways and hedges and city streets and bring home to the liberating feast all the other outcasts, people we perceive as good or bad without discriminating among them, in fact extending God’s love to just whomever we can find.

So much for the vision. But talk is cheap sometimes and politics (the actual brokering of power in society that implements vision) is tough. So now I want to raise a few questions for us as a group of Christian lesbians and bisexuals out together, questions that arose in my mind as I was reading Shane Phelan’s new book, *Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

The first question is this: how can we as CLOUT members make Christian lesbianism visible “in our irreducible plurality” and in all the truth of what Phelan calls “the instability of lesbian identity”?⁸ Perhaps, instead of assuming that those who call themselves bisexuals simply have not yet gotten up the courage to call themselves lesbian, we should learn to “welcome the specificity of each new person’s mode of life.” By this porous, pluralistic, postmodern standard of lesbian identity, perhaps some of us were wrong to get angry at Holly Near for marrying a man several years after she had asked us to *Imagine [Her] Surprise*. Perhaps, instead of logical discourse in which we say “Someone is a lesbian only if X,” we should switch simply to paying attention to one another’s stories. Instead of asking, “Are you lesbian and how do you know?” perhaps we should be asking, “What does this woman’s lesbian or bisexual or transgendered identity mean to her? What does her life have to teach us?” Because I have several friends who insist they are bisexual and feel offended to be called lesbian, I am intensely interested in this question and hope it will be discussed in these pages.

Another question: how can we become “lesbian citizens,” gaining power in a larger project of radical democracy that eliminates the special privileges accorded to the normative, the rich, the white, the heterosexual? We lesbians can live in separatist bliss if we want to, but that does nothing for the larger society or the churches to which we belong. If we want to implement the political vision of the Christ-Sophia, we must learn to strategically affiliate ourselves with other political or religious groups in order to overcome exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and systemic violence, not only against ourselves but against oppressed people everywhere. As Phelan says, “Our politics must be informed by affinity rather than identity, not simply because we are not all alike, but because we each embody multiple, often conflicting, identities and locations.”⁹ I take this to mean that CLOUT should readily form coalitions with organizations that are working for goals we share even partially, such as Habitat for Humanity, the Women’s Ordination Conference, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus, or gay male organiza-

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STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

(for review or for first reading by those who are new to our mailing list)

Christian Lesbians OUT Together, CLOUT, is a developing coalition of "out" lesbian Christians in solidarity with one another. Because Christian institutions have historically devalued the gifts and stifled the voices of lesbian women, we hold our identity as "Christian" and "Lesbian" in creative tension. We respect the right of every woman to define for herself what it means to be both Christian and Lesbian. Our primary purpose is to claim our spiritual and sexual wholeness, to proclaim the goodness of our lives, our ministries and our relationships, and to empower ourselves and each other to challenge the churches to which we belong.

As a developing inter-cultural, multi-racial coalition, we are committed to struggling against all oppressive forces, within ourselves and within institutions of which we are a part. As global citizens and lesbian sisters, we struggle against the forces of sexism and misogyny, heterosexism and homophobia. We disavow racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism, U.S. imperialism, classism, ableism, clericalism and any action, structure, or system that fosters domination and injustice.

We value the richness of partnership between lay and ordained women in ministry, and equally affirm the leadership, gifts, and perspectives of each. Because of the increasing oppression of lesbian clergy and seminarians in the protestant churches at this time, we seek the empowerment of ordained lesbians and those who are being rejected for ordination because we are lesbian. We recognize that lesbian clergy leadership is compromised by institutional policies which reinforce "closeting" and create a high price for openness. Therefore, we will work to overturn such policies, inviting our lesbian clergy sisters to join in claiming our wholeness together. We also recognize that there are those sisters who have not sought the structural privilege of ordination because they do not regard it as necessary or helpful to the integrity and wholeness of their lives and leadership in ministry. We celebrate the diversity of different views and different choices in ministry. Together, we will work on behalf of justice and liberation for all lesbians, lay and ordained, catholic and protestant.

(Next CLOUTreach: the 4 primary aims of CLOUT.)

INTRODUCING THE NEW CLOUT COUNCIL

Mitzi N. Eilts, Chair; Laurie Fox, Treasurer; La Paula Turner,* Program; Lainey Rathgeber, Regional Liaison; Kyle A. Cooper, Fundraising; Susan Leo,* Global Gathering '97; and Diana Vezmar-Bailey,* CLOUTreach Editor/Administrative Coordinator. New regional coordinators are Debby Darrow, Mid Atlantic, and Judith Finlay, Western Region. Lainey Rathgeber will also serve as the Southern region coordinator.

And this is how it all came about: The CLOUT council gathered on Dee Miller's front porch in Rochester all day Thursday before the International Gathering began to discern our present and future as CLOUT. Realities were that no one had officially applied for the National Coordinator position, and no one had sent in an application for the Council. As we engaged one another in conversation about matching needs and time/talents of CLOUT and its constituency, we presented the following to those at the Gathering.

- that Diana Vezmar-Bailey be hired for \$400/month to continue doing the newsletter plus responding to voice mail and correspondence and updating the data base.

- that we elect and/or reassign Council members to specific tasks (listed above).

- that we hold elections early enough in the Conference so that the new and outgoing Council people could meet before heading for home.

- that we continue doing what we do well: newsletter, conferences, networking.

- that we ask Council members--and, indeed, all CLOUT women--to take on the role of spokespersons for CLOUT, since that role, formerly in the National Coordinator's position description, is now reassigned.

- that we encourage the new Council to meet face-to-face at least once between International Gatherings assisted in part with the funds saved by scaling down the Coordinator's position.

Those present at the Gathering concurred with the recommendations of the CLOUT Council. The gathered participants also spent time together in regional groups and came up with additional suggestions for strengthening CLOUT programming and services, particularly at the regional level.

*returning Council members

(Mollenkott, from page 2)

tions, without feeling that our entire agendas and definitions must be fully identified with one another. Again, I invite discussion.

A third question: are we making a mistake to base so much of our plea for first-class citizenship in church and society on the reality many of us feel, that we did not choose and cannot change our sexuality? Certainly my own work has pursued that tack, making analogies between, say, heterosexual injustice and racist injustice. But now I am wondering: perhaps we should also base our claim for equal rights in all categories simply on our status as members, as citizens, regardless of whether or not we feel we chose to become lesbian. From what I hear, about 60% of us lesbians feel we were born lesbian, while the other 40% feel there was some choice involved.

In his book on *Gays/Justice* (Columbia University Press, 1988), Richard Mohr develops an analogy between gay rights and religious freedom that seems important here. Our equal rights as citizens are legally protected in many categories that are pretty well fixed, such as national origin, race, gender, and physical disability; so it has seemed natural to us to argue that sexual orientation is also fixed, as indeed most responsible medical, psychological, and sociological research indicates to be true. Yet as Mohr points out, religious freedom is also a protected category, and not just for those who remain in their religion of birth. We can choose to change religions, but we remain legally protected from discrimination on the basis of our religious affiliation. Our religion may even engage in certain practices that are illegal, such as polygamy or the use of peyote, but nevertheless being a Mormon or a Native American worshiper still qualifies for religious protection. Since our churches benefit from the protection of free choice in religion, perhaps we should push this analogy a whole lot harder than we have formerly done.

To say it another way: because society defines us as outsiders, we can gain clout by making alliances with other outsiders in projects where our goals intersect. But perhaps our approach to churches should change from, "You are unjustly excluding us over something we did not choose and cannot change" to something more like this: "A free society cannot obsessively contain the sexuality of its citizens any more than it can control their religious choices. And a church that respects individual conscience cannot hope to control the sexualities of its members. So why don't Christian churches try instead to re-establish the radically egalitarian society Jesus envisioned, the society he associated with his agenda as Sophia-Christ, the Wisdom of God?"

A fourth question: since white lesbians are open to seduction through access to education, career advancement and pay (and so forth) that many lesbians of color are denied, how can we keep that differential always in our minds and strategies? Aida Hurtado points out that in the United States all women are subordinated to white men, but white women are seduced into subordination through promises of benefits and privileges, whereas women of color are subordinated through rejection and abuse. These two different kinds of subordination cause us to

develop different political responses and skills. How can we white CLOUT members utilize these differences in radically egalitarian ways? How can we see to it that we build a ground together with lesbians of color instead of first staking out our own ground and then inviting lesbians of color to sit on it with us?¹⁰

My fifth and final question is closely related to all the others: is it time to combine our emphasis on individual liberation with more emphasis on the acquisition of power, including political clout? The metaphor of liberation suggests gaining self-respect while remaining somewhat powerless to change political systems. Many of us have done good work of empowering ourselves and others in individual ways. But isn't it time to envision a radical democratizing politics in which we would gain power in order to transform it? Power-over is neutral, not evil, despite what many feminists have said. In my college classroom, I have dozens of ways of seeing to it that everybody reads the assignment and learns the work. That is the exercise of power-over; but I use that power transformatively, attempting to empower each student to use her or his own mind and hear his or her own voice entering into serious and respectful discussion. We Christian lesbians should not in my opinion be trying to eliminate all power-over others but rather to gain political power in order to recreate it and reconfigure it democratically.¹¹ I suspect that affinity politics rather than identity politics will be part of the answer to this question as well as to earlier ones, and I eagerly await discussion from others among my sisters.

¹John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (Harper San Francisco, 1995), p. 69.

²Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *In Search of the Christ-Sophia* (Mystic, CT: 23rd Publications, 1995), p. 29. For superb discussion of the entire Godhead as Sophia, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1993).

³Lecture delivered by Virginia Burrus at Drew University, March 22, 1995.

⁴Crossan, p. 67.

⁵*Consuming Passions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 4 and 211.

⁶See Peter Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honor in Kelye Society," in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Medieval Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 211-212.

⁷Crossan, p. 70. ⁸Phelan, p. 96. ⁹Phelan, p. 140. ¹⁰Phelan, pp. 116, 158.

¹¹Phelan, p. 121.

Editor's note: Virginia described Aldredge-Clanton's book as "readable" and Johnson's "challenging."

The Timidity Fight Song

(Sung to the tune of
"Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus")

We are introverted; to be shy is our right.
We will not be converted; we won't give up the fight.
We will not take your insults; we won't be pushed around.
But we will stand here proudly, and stare at the ground.

by Faith Markle who, joined by Leslie Chartier, sang this song at the Rochester Gathering, dedicated to Janie Spahr.

"Rising From Our Roots"
Selisse Berry and La Paula Turner
Downtown United Presbyterian Church
August 18, 1995

The first reading: Isaiah 28:16-17

Therefore these are the words of Yahweh God:
I am laying a stone in Zion, a block of granite,
a precious corner-stone well founded;
those who have faith will not waver.
I shall use justice as a plumb-line
and righteousness as a plummet.
Then hail will sweep away your refuge of lies
and floodwaters carry away your shelter.

The second reading: "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

La Paula: So, what will we leave behind? What will we leave our families? Who is our family? What will we leave our church? Who is our church? What will we leave the next generation? Who is the next generation? What will be our legacy? Would any of this be determined by our foundation, our roots? Roots, well . . .

I was born the daughter of a dishwasher who dreamed of being an artist, the granddaughter of a shrewd business woman who dreamed of being an opera singer, the great granddaughter of a Black Cherokee.

I was born the daughter of a maintenance man who dreamed of being a florist, the granddaughter of a man whom I saw only once and he took me to my first baseball game in Memphis, Tennessee, the great granddaughter of someone I never knew and never heard a word about.

As a Colored girl who grew up to be a Negro, who accepted and claimed being Black in the '60's and who is still dealing with being African-American, maybe because Jesse said so, . . . I am very pleased that I am who I am.



La Paula Turner & Selisse Berry

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

I learned about God through my grandmother; I was her first grandchild and her favorite. She loved God and revered God. We (my little cousin and I) were not allowed to move during the thunder and electrical storms of springtime in Tennessee. We sat on the couch and she paced the floor and talked to her God. We listened while she sang "Open my eyes, that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me. . . ." She sang "All to Jesus, I surrender. . . ." She sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, comin' for to carry me home." She calmed us down and she must have calmed God down, too, because by the time she stopped singing the storm was over.

Now let's see, if God was Lord, my grandmother must be Lady, they worked together so well.

Growing up in the south was not the greatest experience for a pretty little black girl who could get a seat on the front of the bus because she was a "cute little colored girl" while her grandmother had to stand in the back of the bus. That soon changed because I learned to say "thank you for the seat, my grandmother can sit here and I'll sit on her lap." Well what could the sweet little white lady say to the cute little colored girl; she just gave us the seat. What was I learning, what was the real truth of the situation?

That was my beginning, Selisse, what about you?

Selisse: I am the daughter of a school teacher, the granddaughter of a doctor and nurse, and the great granddaughter of farmers in Switzerland.

I am the daughter of an artist, the granddaughter of a man who created a lake and a woman who took in ironing and the great granddaughter of a minister.

I grew up in Oklahoma and I now live in San Francisco. I really love San Francisco but I have to admit there's one thing I'm not that fond of and that's that it's often freezing in the summer time. This past spring I knew I was looking forward to several months of a cold damp foggy summer. That was when I heard the desert call me. I woke up one morning and knew that I had to go to the desert.

I called my friend Kathryn Poethig and told her that I had to go to the desert and I wanted her to go with me. We had a wonderful time driving down to Joshua Tree National Monument and both felt that the desert held magic.

On Saturday I went for a long walk and found my soul feeling so relieved to be among such enormous rocks. The rocks spoke to me of strength, of solid foundations, of connections to something so deep and so dense, I had no words for it. There were times when I would stand next to a rock and stretch out my arms around it and put my cheek next to its coolness. Or I would lie down on a large flat rock and stretch out my arms to feel its strength next to me. My whole being felt rooted and secure.

I felt such a strong connection to my roots, and interestingly to a sense of home that I had never really experienced before. As we drove away from our campsite later that day I was amazed at the beauty that surrounded us and that feeling of groundedness stayed with me. That was the very day, in one of life's poignant ironies, that I learned that my mother had died.

My mom had had a stroke a year before and was not in good health, but she was relatively young and ornery and my sisters and I felt like she would be around for a very long time. My mom got married and had three children during a time when that seemed like the only option she had as a woman. She was also an artist, and was very creative. And she was eccentric and temperamental. She was very talented in many ways but not really at being a mom. She was a mom because that was what women were in the 1950's in Oklahoma. And she struggled with her role as a mom, a wife and a creative artist.

As Kathryn and I were driving away from Joshua Tree, I knew it had been my mom who had asked me to come to the desert. She told me that she finally felt foot loose and fancy free and I had a vivid picture of her dancing on the horizon. She seemed to be delighted that I was in the desert because the desert is such a beautiful place. The desert is full of magic.

My mother was an unhappy woman and I grew up wanting to make her happy. After a lot of prayer and therapy and healing relationships, I realized that only my mom could make herself happy and that I was only responsible for my own happiness. At the time of her death, I had a very real sense that she was finally free and that I felt grounded. And those two things were somehow deeply connected. The day my mom died, the rocks had held me and reminded me of being connected and of being home.

La Paula: My grandmother taught me about Jesus, how he was a friend to us all and so as a little girl, he became my friend because being an only child, I needed a playmate.

I graduated 10th in my high school class. I received a full scholarship to a college in Greensborough, North Carolina. My grandmother could not fathom my living in another state, so she tried to make a deal with me, that if I went to college in Memphis, she would pay for it. Well, I thought, I'd outsmart her. I'd had proposals from five young men; I'd run away with the first one that showed up, and I did. I hadn't outsmarted her; I hadn't been very smart at all.

It was only after I'd had a miserable second marriage and birthed six children that I finally went to college. Well, it was actually after my last child, a daughter was born on the same day that my grandmother died and a year later, I didn't know how to observe my grandmother's death and celebrate my daughter's birth at the same time, and was brutally beaten by a man that was not my children's father that I ran away to St. Louis, Missouri and matriculated through Harris Teachers College. Did you get that? Sometimes still it is painful to remember.

My grandmother died at 4:30 a.m. on the 11th of July 1965. My daughter literally stood up in my stomach at 4:30 a.m. while I was in labor. She and my grand must have had some kinda' conversation because she was not actually born until 10:00 a.m. on the 11th of July 1965.

My grand had been my strength, my grand had been my wisdom, my comfort in times of trouble, she had been my deliverer, my everything! I hated my mother for being alive. What could she give me? (How selfish I was.) Where had she been all my life anyway? (How blind I had been.) What would I do now? My foundation had broken open and crumbled under my feet. I was experiencing an emotional and spiritual earthquake! Where was my God, where was my Lady? Who would watch over me now? Living a year without my grand was unbearable. I just wanted to die. I had no resources. I was too proud to go on welfare - besides Tennessee has a thing about giving less to women of color than to white women. My inheritance was stolen from me by family; my children's father was too busy beginning a new

family. My children looked to me for food, for clothing, for care and compassion, for love, for an explanation of what happened to their great grandmother. What would I do now? To whom would I look for help? . . . "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LADY who dwells in heaven and earth.

Selisse: I grew up in the Presbyterian Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma. When I was in high school I would go with the senior high fellowship every spring break on work trips. Without ever really having a specific conversation, our Senior High Fellowship group was committed to two things: working for justice and having a really good time.

The church never hit me over the head with theology or with a bunch of rules about my behavior. But it provided a foundation for me, a structure within which to work around issues of injustice. In very subtle ways, I learned about racism and about poverty and hunger. And I got on some very deep level that I was responsible for working to change things. Because I had some level of privilege, I didn't have to become obsessed with white guilt, but I couldn't just sit back and do nothing. As an adult I have recognized that as a white, educated middle-class woman, I must do my part to work against racism in this society and to work to change the structures which oppress people of color and poor people and women, which sometimes means **shaking** the very foundations of those structures which may even include the institutional church.

Many of the reasons I decided to go to seminary had their roots in those early youth fellowship days in Oklahoma. I went to seminary because I thought it would enable me to work for social change as a full time job and I was naive enough at the time to think that I could actually get paid to do it! But something happened while I was in seminary. Something unforgivable by the Presbyterian church's standards. At the ripe old age of 30, I finally acknowledged who I am as a lesbian woman and began to live openly with regards to who I am and who I love. Suddenly the injustice that I had been taught by my own church to hate was being perpetrated on me as a lesbian by the very same institution. The same church that had taught me about love and justice was no longer a welcome place for me.

Sometimes we are called to build foundations. And sometimes we are called to shake the foundations of structures that oppress and destroy the human spirit.

Two weeks ago I was in Cincinnati at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. On Saturday night, during the PLGC gathering, Janie and I and several of the contributors to the book *Called OUT* had an opportunity to read from our stories in the book. The very first person who came up to me afterwards to have me sign his book was Gordon Edwards who is now the pastor of my home church in Oklahoma. He wanted me to sign his book and another book he had purchased for two lesbian women who had celebrated a holy union in his church. Two lesbians who live in my home town in Oklahoma.

I was quite moved and had a deep sense that while I was doing my part for justice by living in San Francisco and helping to edit a book on lesbian and gay Presbyterians, those two women are doing their part by being an out lesbian couple in Stillwater and Gordon is doing his part as a straight, white male Presbyterian minister by being an ally and breaking the rules of the national church by performing a same sex holy union.

All of us are in the process of building--and shaking--our foundations.

La Paula: And shaken again, I was at a General Conference. The Holy Spirit moved: in tongues, interpretation, healings. The Holy Spirit was not a part of my consciousness until I found the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, where I am now an ordained clergy. At first I experienced the Holy Spirit in the process of receiving Holy Communion. I thought that I felt so new because there was actually wine served at The Holy Supper, but as my journey continued I began to recognize the Holy Spirit in my life.

During my college days, I became starkly aware of my Lesbianism. I fell in love with one of my Sorority sisters. She was white pledging a black sorority. She was very butch and I was "Miss Fem of every year," so my sorority sisters placed me in charge of teaching her how to be and walk like a "lady."

I lied about my past life and said I had no children. But here I was in a Teachers College. I became the first undergraduate to hold an international office in Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, my lover became my support. In a hidden room at her father's house, I told her of my secret and the pain of leaving my children. I prayed so hard that they would not hate me.

My journey became pressed for time, time that I had spent being miserable as a housewife, dreaming of being somebody who would make a difference in the world, pushing back the call to ministry that continued to press through to the front of my heart and mind.

I was active in the community through my college. I became a speaker to young black people during the riots of the late '60's. My Afro was as big as Angela Davis's, but I didn't have her courage.

I was known as a radical, big haired, mini-skirted, mega-voiced speaker for justice for my people, a champion for the rioters who burned down their roach and rat-infested homes owned by slumlords who had never cared about their lives, only about their money.

Being a radical about my lifestyle came a little slower. God and I didn't have a problem with it; I just didn't know how to face people. Why did they hate me just because I loved a woman and she loved me back? Well, I finally asked myself, why do they hate me just because of my permanent tan? OOOOOOOOOO! I got it! It was their own fear and their own self hatred. I hadn't planned my existence as a Lesbian or as a Black woman. I chose to be a mother and yes, I chose to be Christian. And finally I chose to say yes to El Shaddai and reckon with being clergy. Now, I had to deal with all of what justice meant. NOT just for my people, but to break the chain of all the isms: racism, able-ism, ageism, sexism, politically-correct ism.

Selisse: A group of us have just spent the weekend together for a national gathering of CLOUT (Christian Lesbians Out Together). When we were trying to come up with a theme for this CLOUT gathering, we talked about the desire to focus on who we are, where we've been and where we're going. We all laughed when we heard someone suggest *CLOUT, Our One Foundation*, but it seemed to work. It works because for many of us, CLOUT has become foundational in the ways we live in this world. We are out lesbians and we are part of a larger lesbian and gay community. And in many different ways and for many reasons, we also find our community in the church. Even in spite of the church's sexism

and homophobia and racism, we have experienced a sense of home, a sense of family.

We feel a sense of community because we are all in this together. Because all of us as members of CLOUT and PLGC and members of MCC and Dignity and Integrity and UCC Lesbian and Gay Coalition, we are all committed to supporting each other and are committed to struggling against the institutions which oppress us. **And** we also feel a sense of community because of people who are allies like Gordon Edwards and Gail Ricciuti and Virginia Davidson. . . and because of people like you, because of Downtown United Presbyterian Church, a church that has dared to stand up against injustice, who because of *its* firm foundation, has been called to shake the foundations of the Presbyterian Church (USA) with justice and with truth.

The church is our roots. It has been our family and our home. And it has been a source of pain. We have been called to build. . . and we have also been called to rise. Up from the past that's rooted in pain, I rise. Leaving behind self hatred and fear, I rise. Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear, I rise.

I have been to the desert and have felt my roots grow deep. I have stretched out my arms and have felt the wisdom of the ages in the massive strength of granite. I have sat in meetings with people from my church who have committed their lives to the pursuit of justice. I have seen the spirit in the faces of our allies and friends. I have felt God's presence during strategy meetings and demonstrations and during civil and ecclesiastical disobedience.

I feel the spirit moving among the 50,000 women who will meet at the end of August for the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, of which I will be a part, to work toward access to health care and education and justice for all women and to join hands around the globe to combat violence against women everywhere it exists. I felt God's presence at the PLGC gathering in Cincinnati as women and men told their stories of being lesbian and gay and bisexual and transgendered Presbyterians. And I felt God's infinite passion as women from across the United States and Canada gathered together this week-end to celebrate the miracle of being OUT, lesbian and Christian.

I have felt my roots go deep and I have felt my spirit soar.

La Paula: My heroes are the 11 women who became ordained in the Episcopal Church in 1974. They gave me foundation to stand my ground and be counted in my ministerial journey.

My heroes are the courageous women and men who rode the busses to Mississippi, who took part in sit-ins, who spoke out and took risks to sound the drums of justice. They gave me foundation to stand my ground and be counted when confronting the legislature.

My heroes are those women who are political prisoners. Their commitment laid the foundation that gives me strength to continue in the struggle for justice.

Hail to the writers who saved my spirit from traveling a narrow, limiting road and broadened my horizons: Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, Virginia Mollenkott, Adrienne Rich, Judy Grahn, Carter Heyward, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde and of course our Poet Laureate Maya Angelou.

My heroes are the women of UFMCC. Janie Spahr, you are my hero.

You know who these persons are in your lives. If you don't, go out and find them. They are there waiting for the spirit of Christ in you to reach out to them, waiting for the pain in their lives to be dissipated and replaced by the clear cool water of the Holy Spirit, waiting for the hatred for themselves and those who are different to re-energize into love and hope for the future, waiting for the person who's afraid to challenge the status quo to become justice oriented in everyday life. It is time for you, too, to rise from the dust. These are our families, these are our churches. Let's talk and decide productively what will be our legacy for the next generation.

Both: Leaving behind self-hatred and fear

La Paula: let us rise.

Both: Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear,

Selisse: let us rise.

I am a black ocean, leaping and wide

La Paula: Welling and swelling, I bear in the tide

Selisse: leaving behind us the fear and the pain

I rise.

La Paula: Into a new day with justice and truth

I rise.

Both: I rise.

I rise.

I rise.

from MITZI EILTS *CLOUT Council, Chair:*

It's my first communication with CLOUT signers and friends, and thanks to the nature of the gathering in Rochester the topic is an important one: racism. Racism was a key part of the main program and was explored in some of the workshops at Rochester. As such, a solid foundation was made for the discussion which occurred as the group set out to nominate and elect a new Council from among those present on Saturday, August 12.

The sea of nearly all white faces at Rochester was surprising to many--to those present at the two previous CLOUT gatherings, to those whose lives are lived in communities with more racial diversity, to those who want something different than the *status quo* for CLOUT. And so we talked together, women of color and white women, about what factors may have contributed to fewer lesbians of color being present at this gathering. We talked about how the little racial diversity affected all of us and each of us--similarly and differently. We discovered and celebrated that there was actually more racial diversity than could easily be seen among us, and discussed the tensions in all of that reality as well. We identified economics, as well as political and personal agendas as potential factors.

Finally, we honored who we were for now: a group with only a bit of actual racial diversity and a group with a lot of interest and commitment to uncovering our role, resources and power in dealing with racism. In confessing our current location we held up the vision that this is not all we can or will be--that we believe that CLOUT gatherings can again be more racially inclusive and/or we will find ways to align ourselves with the issues and organizations where lesbians of color already live. We committed ourselves to change vs. apology, guilt and paralysis.

We're not the first group, nor the last, to come face to face with racism in our midst and make such a commitment. Many have fallen far short of such a commitment. I dare say, though, I believe we can and will gain ground on this issue. We must, for as Christians such justice is required of us. We must, for as lesbians we know the systems of gender, orientation and race

oppression are integrally linked. We must, for those of us who are lesbians of color must not be forced to choose one identity over another.

The new CLOUT Council is committed to seeing racism as interconnected to all our mission. As its chair, I covenant now with all of you that each time the council meets (on the phone or in person) reviewing our progress on racism will be on the agenda.* I also challenge and support each signer and friend of CLOUT--white people and people of color--look for the ways, the people and the groups where you personally and CLOUT locally and regionally can make alliances. We can be in a very different place when once again CLOUT gathers two years from now in Portland, Oregon.

I am acutely aware that many of you reading this do not know me, nor I you. Trusting that we each walk our talk comes only with time. It is my hope and prayer that in time and space, we will have opportunity to work together on all of this and more. And such working together, I know, will not always be sweet. We will disagree. We will have to figure out how to argue with each other, express rage and anger without destroying, challenge and support and forgive each other, and always keep seeking the kingdom [*Yes, we're dropping the "g" these days!--ed.*] of God before us and all around us.

If you have things you would like to communicate to the Council about this issue, to me in regard to this article, or to CLOUT as a coalition/movement (which was another important conversation we had in Rochester over issues of purpose/mission, membership, non-profit status, etc.--fodder for another article in an upcoming *CLOUTreach*) please write, call or e-mail. You will find addresses and numbers elsewhere in this newsletter.

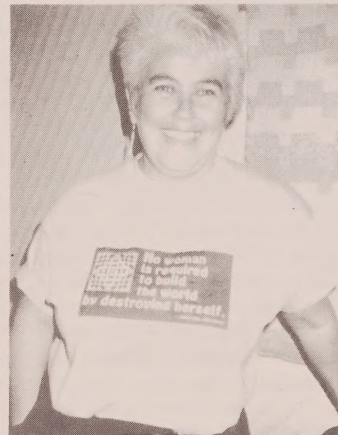
Racism. Not a pretty word; an even uglier reality, one which diminishes us all. Thank God, I believe it can be unlearned. With God/dess's help it can be dismantled. We know it is not the way things ought or have to be. We are called to be part of this new heaven and new earth. Thanks be to God!

*Note: the FOR FUND (For Overcoming Racism) discussed at the business meeting in Rochester is on the Council's agenda for our September and October conference calls.

Pray for Peace

People across the world have been invited to join in two minutes of simultaneous prayer for peace in Bosnia - Herzegovina each Friday from August 11 - September 11 at 12 noon Pacific time, 3:00 Eastern time. At the CLOUT conference, all joined in this effort.

Perhaps we CLOUT sisters can continue this moment of prayers for peace beyond September 11 and expand the prayer to include global peace.



Mitzi N. Eilts

From the Editor/Coordinator
Diana Vezmar-Bailey

Dear Women in CLOUTland:

I've hit the ground running after the International Gathering. Letters to do, people to call, pictures to develop, po box, voice mail, . . . Phew. On my way to & fro, I've been reflecting on my CLOUT journey that brought me to this place.

I first heard about CLOUT from CathyAnn Beaty upon her return from New York. I eagerly signed the Statement of Commitment, having recently (January 1989) requested to be "relieved of the practice of ordained office" in the Presbyterian church. You *bet* I'm out!!

I remember the incredible indomitable energy in '91 in Minneapolis during a record snowstorm (which is *saying* something about snow!). We cheered the arrival of lusty women who didn't let the snow stop them. I can still remember what it felt like being in a small group with Carter Heyward and Mary Hunt discussing "out" and "christian" and "lesbian."

While mowing the lawn one summer day in '93, I realized that I couldn't NOT afford the San Francisco gathering. (Plastic makes it *too* easy to travel. . . .) Since I had been doing a newsletter for my day job, I volunteered to do CLOUTreach while at that Gathering. That certainly kept CLOUT alive for me for the next couple

National Just Say VETO Campaign

Contact President Clinton between September 18 - 22 and ask him to **VETO** the **1995 CONGRESSIONAL WELFARE REFORM BILL**. Call the White House (202-456-1111) or fax the White House (202-456-2461) to request Clinton say NO to ending the federal safety net for the most vulnerable in our society. Over 14.5 million poor women and children will be brought to the threshold of hunger by the time limits, block grants, child exclusions and exclusions of legal immigrants contained in the welfare "reform" plans being enacted by Congress.

This request is from **Interfaith Voices Against Hunger**, a project of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger and is a call by Jews, Christians, Muslims and other people of faith for government action to end hunger. The National Just Say VETO Campaign is coordinated by the Welfare Reform Network of New York (WRN), sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. For more information, contact Debra Pucci, WRN, at (212) 777-4800, ext. 357, (212) 533-8792 Fax. Or contact Deborah Cruz, Interfaith Voices Against Hunger, at (212) 227-8480, (212) 385-4330 Fax. Or contact CLOUT's own Judith Walker at (212) 227-8480, (212) 385-4330 Fax.

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&/or the newsletter, send to
PO Box 10062, Columbus, OH 43201
(Note new address!)

Thanks to Columbus folders, staplers, and stamp-
lickers Jackie, Joyce, Leslie, Linda, Mary and Trecia
who did their part to get
the Spring CLOUTreach in the mail.

*beginning in 1996

of years.

Negotiating with the Council in Rochester for the administrative side of the Coordinator's responsibilities began to feel like a . . . Call.

Each of the gatherings has been *so* powerful for me spiritually. Each has been very unlike the others. The common thread was (& will continue to be) that being Christian and Lesbian and OUT is where we *started*. No apologies, no explanations, no wondering "What if they found out?", no energy poured into getting to a common starting place. And so the theology and tears & laughter & sheer joy of being part of the variety of God's wonderful creation permeated each Gathering. And we are also freed to tend to our racism with greater intentionality.

When the new Council was getting acquainted at Rochester, I surprised myself by introducing myself as a mystic. (Another closet door swings open.) There were even those who came out as timid during the Gathering! (Note song elsewhere in this issue.) I look forward to CLOUT's continuing to build on that foundation, to invite us each out of whatever *other* closets we're in--& empowering us to become all God/dess created us to be. And I rejoice that *you* will be with me on that journey.

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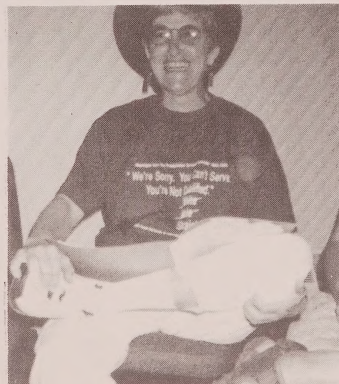
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Though the auction income and pledges received at the Rochester Gathering helped our budget enormously, Laurie Fox, our new treasurer, cautions that we still need people to honor their commitments if we are to meet our 1995 expenses. Contact Laurie if you would like to receive a copy of the budget.

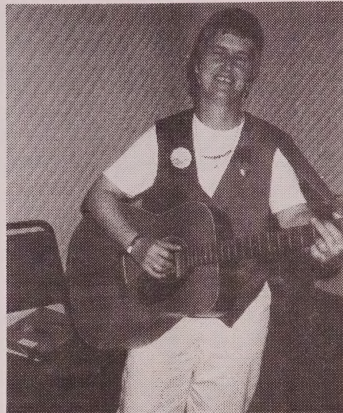


Janie Spahr, Auctioneer

OUR GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION TO THOSE WHO HAVE FORGED A PATH FOR US. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR ALL YOUR GOOD WORK, AND TRUST THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO SHARE YOUR GIFTS WITH US AS WE CONTINUE TO BE WOMEN WITH CLOUT!



Selisse Berry, retiring (er, ah. . .) outgoing National Coordinator, for all her incredible work, energy, & humor.



Melanie Morrison, former co-chair, for her steady presence and deep commitment.



Dee Miller, former treasurer, for her tending to endless details and yeoperson's work hosting the gathering at SUNY Brockport.



CLOUT
PO BOX 10062
COLUMBUS, OH 43201

CLOUTreach

The Quarterly Newsletter for Christian Lesbians OUT Together

BERRY IN BEIJING: CLOUT'S IMPACT FELT

by Selisse Berry

CLOUT was one of thousands of women's grassroots organizations represented in Beijing at the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum coinciding with the United Nations International Conference on Women. Prior to the conference, rumors abounded that people who would not be admitted into China included women from Taiwan, Tibet and lesbian women. The badge that I received in order to attend the conference spelled out our acronym: Christian Lesbians OUT Together. I wore the badge with both pride and a little trepidation.

Upon arriving at the conference, it became clear that lesbians were very visible. We had our own tent and had scheduled many workshops and panel discussions devoted to concerns and issues facing lesbians worldwide. CLOUT co-sponsored one such workshop called "Spirit and Action: Lesbian Activism from an Interfaith Perspective." Those of us on the panel spoke of our experience as lesbian activists from our particular faith perspective. I spoke about the founding of CLOUT and the work we do as an organization and as individual members working for change within the churches and within particular denominations.

Sandy Boucher spoke from her perspective as a Buddhist woman and Barbara Zoloth from her perspective as a Jewish lesbian. Victoria Rue shared her experience as a

Roman Catholic lesbian activist; Lucinda Ramberg spoke of her difficult choice to leave the church where she had known family and community. Kathryn Poethig (Presbyterian) and Roxanne Stevens (Unitarian Universalist) participated by leading the group in a closing ritual, while Judith McDaniel (Quaker) facilitated the workshop as the emcee. It was quite a powerful group of women followed by a dynamic discussion in a standing room only crowd. Later in the week, we repeated the workshop in the lesbian tent for those who were unable to attend because of lack of space.

After the workshop I spoke to a woman who is part of a group, called Chinese Queer Sisters in Hong Kong, who have received funding from the Hong Kong Women's Christian Council to participate in a joint project. Buddhist women from Thailand were present as well as lesbians involved in the Ba'hai faith in Bermuda. We were all amazed and gratified by the connections we share with women and lesbians from around the world as we spoke of those intersections between our sexuality, our faith practice and our activism.

Since returning from Beijing in September, I have had many opportunities to show my slides and to talk about my experience at the NGO Forum. I am often asked how

(More)



NGO Workshop Co-Sponsored by CLOUT

(Beijing continued)

it is that I was able to attend such a conference. I begin by acknowledging that I feel very privileged for being able to be part of such an historical event and recognize that many women and men helped support me financially and emotionally. But my original commitment to participate happened a while ago.

In 1985 while teaching school in Dallas, Texas, one of my co-teachers gave me a document called the Forward Looking Strategies Toward the Year 2000 from the UN International Conference on Women in Nairobi. I was quite taken, not just with the document, but with the notion of attending such a global event for women. That day while surrounded by 8th grade boys and girls, I made a quiet commitment to somehow participate in the next international conference on women.

Several years ago I heard about the conference in Beijing and realized that I had the opportunity to make my dream come true. I began talking to Kathryn Poethig who shared my interest in participating in the conference. She is on the board of the Center for Women and Religion (CWR) at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and was in conversation with the interim director, Marta Vidas, about the possibility of organizing a group to go to China. Several months and many logistical and fundraising efforts later, I was on my way to Shanghai with 25 women from CWR. As a group we traveled through China for ten days before flying to Beijing for the conference.

At the NGO forum there were over 100 workshops held every two hours. You could spend the whole day

deciding what to do and where to go. There were also plenary sessions and cultural events and panel discussions and press conferences every minute of every day. It was quite a challenge to select among the kaleidoscope of events and to get from one event to another.

I remember a day when I stood for several minutes at an intersection and watched women pass me from two different directions. As I stood there I was amazed at the colors of the fabric in the women's clothing and the diversity of the faces streaming past me. To be a part of this historical event was truly an incredible experience.

And then there was the day I had gone to several workshops that had been postponed or closed and it was raining and I was soaking wet. I went to a tent that was leaking and ordered a cup of weak instant coffee with powdered creamer and I thought to myself, I have dreamed about this conference for the past ten years and I have worked for two years to be sitting here today and all I want to do is go back to my hotel and read a book.

The conference was not all smiles and solidarity. But what an amazing feat for women from all over the world to gather together to declare emphatically that violence against women must be stopped; that women and girls have basic human rights that must be honored; that women are entitled to education and property and health care. We came together to learn from each other and to remind each other that we are not alone.

And it doesn't stop with Beijing. I believe that the energy and the commitment and the magic that is generated by such a gathering continues. May it continue.

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lickers of the Summer/Autumn CLOUTreach
Cherie, Jerry, Joyce, Karen & Leslie.



CLOUT Persons Selisse Berry and Lucinda
Ramberg at the Lesbian March in Beijing

One Whore to Another

Mary E. Hunt

in Appreciative Response to
Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

[See Summer/Autumn 1995 CLOUTreach]

I count it a privilege to respond to my beloved friend and colleague Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. If it is whores we are, then it is whores we are together! I have long said that although we come from very different starting points--evangelical Protestantism and progressive Roman Catholicism--Virginia and I find ourselves in deep agreement more often than not. It was Virginia who bellowed, "Grace is a lesbian," in a local Washington, D.C. church, waking me up to her marvelous work.

Virginia's provocative article in these pages continues the stimulating scholarship that she has long contributed to the field. As always, she articulates a well grounded position in language and imagery that makes it as informative as it is accessible. I will take up her five questions in an appreciative follow-up. My remarks are intended to add to CLOUT's growing corpus of lesbian/bi-sexual theological reflection, and to invite even more comments from our readership.

(1) Lesbian identity in all of its plurality and wavering stability continues to vex. I am with Virginia on this one, open to the wide range of ways in which people understand themselves sexually. I admit to having worried about Holly Near's bedmates in an earlier life, but the rigors of postmodern deconstructed queer consciousness have freed me from all that. Did she really get married? Well, at least I appreciate that rigid categories do not last long, and that sexual identity is flexible.

I take seriously the scientific literature which seems to point to some genetic component to all of this. And on the other side of the fence, Martine Rothblatt's *Apartheid of Sex: A Manifesto on the Freedom of Gender*, a look at transsexual transgressions of gender categories, is a fascinating challenge to everything I once "knew" to be the case about gender. How people act and not what they are gives me more clues which is why I encourage talking about sexual integrity rather than sexual identity, orientation or preference. When it comes to working together for justice, the more the merrier.

(2) On being lesbian citizens, again I think Virginia is right on the money. The limits of identity politics have become obvious, especially in our community where race and class continue to divide lesbian from lesbian to a much greater extent than some magical sisterhood unites us. I say this with regret and resolve. Affinity politics is weak in the U.S. at this moment, but with Virginia's encouragement I think CLOUT can join with many other groups to try to stem the rising tide of right-wing political and pseudo-religious groups.

Two practical problems combine to make this easier

said than done. The first is that some groups with whom we would make common cause will not make common cause with us. Witness: most so-called liberal Christian churches and their umbrellas like the World Council of Churches that want a group of organized lesbians like they want to lose their tax-exempt status.

The second problem is that such coalition efforts are great when they are reciprocal, but history is replete with examples of women losing all claim to justice in efforts to join with other oppressed peoples. I think immediately of the gay movement in all of its complexity. At the end of the day it is not very feminist. Still, the urgency of anti-racism work and the need to shift power, beginning with sharing our wealth, make me join Virginia in the fond hope that as lesbian citizens we will make a difference.

(3) The nature-nurture debate does little to solve anything. But injustice is injustice. I think that Virginia is on the right track here, too, in that special pleading is finally pleading. It does not matter why I am a lesbian when it comes to how I should be treated. Christianity will eventually have to come to grips with its own internal contradiction: either people are radically equal or they are not. There is no middle ground. Meanwhile, I will not apologize for whom or how I love, and I do not recommend that anyone else do so either.

History is on our side on this one. Recall that but a generation ago normative sex in the U.S. was heterosexual and open to procreation. Now, normative sex is that focused on mutual pleasure and protected from the transmission of disease, gender constellation unspecified. Ironically, we are the experts on this kind of sexuality, not our heterosexual sisters. What remains is to eradicate violence in all of its sexual guises, and that will keep us busy for generations to come.

(4) Anti-racism work is, I believe, the major challenge we face as lesbian women. I join Virginia on this one as well, as we spell out the range of ways in which all of us can go at it. CLOUT, like many similar groups, has made this a priority, with sensitivity to the ways in which women from oppressed racial/ethnic groups face multiple forms of marginalization.

I foresee us engaged in this form for some decades to come because the events of the past few years have made clear that racism is deepening in this country despite the efforts of many well-intentioned people. That is why groups like CLOUT which are predominantly white need to keep this work on the front burner for the foreseeable future, regardless of the number of women of color who are part of the membership.

I submit for discussion that one reason progress is slow is because we have failed to deal with the ways in which economic inequities are woven into the pattern of racism. For example, why, as the stock market continues to soar and corporate profits reach unprecedented levels, is the gap

Getting to Know You: CLOUT Council Members

Hi, my name is **Laurie Fox**, and I'm an out lesbian Christian. I am also a 47 year old pale-skinned mother of two not-so-pale skinned) handsome six foot tall young men.

I was born in Chicago in May of 1948, just before my Dad graduated from medical school. For the first eight years of my life we lived in Chicago, Michigan (twice), Humacao Puerto Rico, Texas, and Illinois. Then we settled down in Ann Arbor, where I lived until I went away to school.

I went to school at Hope College (liberal arts/Reformed Church in America) in Holland, Michigan, and graduated with a (pretty useless) BA in psychology with a minor in music. After graduating, I lived in Detroit, San Francisco, Champaign, Chicago, New Orleans, Amsterdam and Bussum (in the Netherlands), New York and Hoboken before settling down in Los Angeles. I have now been in LA almost 12 years - longer than I've lived anywhere! I'm an English-Dutch-Latvian-American.

I had an intimate friendship with a woman at college but didn't know that loving a woman was an option, so I didn't take that relationship seriously. I married a guy I met at school and stayed with him for almost 20 years. The last 7 were pretty painful, but I finally got up the courage to leave. I moved in with my best friend, a woman I had met at work, and with whom I had fallen in love the year before. She died of lung cancer 7 months later. That was 6 years ago, and I've been with some other women during that time; but now I'm alone, and trying to get to a place where I can be comfortable with that.

I grew up in a pretty liberal Methodist church. The Methodist Youth Fellowship was my primary community. In high school and college I got involved with the Ecumenical Institute. After I got married, we joined the staff of the Institute, which was set up as an ecumenical, residential third (family) order. We did everything but take vows. We stayed in the Order for 15 years. When we left, we joined a local Presbyterian church. I am an ordained Deacon and Elder, currently serving on the session and singing in the choir of West Hollywood Presbyterian Church.

To keep a roof over my head, I do bookkeeping and office work for a small dress designer/manufacturer. Both my boss and the designer are gay, and they take good care of their employees. I like my work because it's close to home, I can wear my jeans and t-shirts to work, my boss appreciates my work, and he basically leaves me alone. It's nice.

Some other things I enjoy or are important to me are: celebrating diversity, feminist theology, participatory ecology (I'm an avid recycler!), planting trees, networking with other women, singing, listening to music (the older the better!), hiking, biking, swimming and being present to/caring for people (especially people with AIDS and cancer, too many of whom have already died).

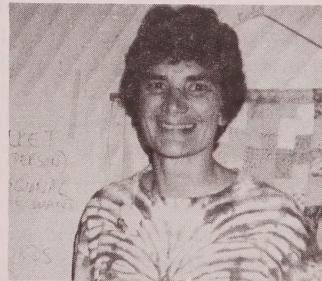
I like CLOUT because it's a loose, informal, unstructured gathering of a beautifully diverse group of women, that we can create to be whatever we want it to be. CLOUT gives me a chance to celebrate all the aspects of myself and be appreciated for who I am today. Thank you for sharing your lives with me.

Susan Leo is the coordinator for the next CLOUT Global Gathering. A 1994 graduate of San Francisco Theological Seminary, Leo (as she is known by her CLOUT family) is a candidate for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA). She lives in Portland and works for the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon while waiting for the PC(USA) to get its act together.

Leo, a native Texan, grew up in Wooster, Ohio. She was an archetypal tomboy, playing baseball, going fishing, and riding her trusty Schwinn all over the countryside. She read all the Hardy Boys mysteries, beat up the local bully and pined endlessly over Julie Andrews. After graduating college in 1972, Leo moved to Portland, began to play softball, and kissed her first woman--not necessarily in that order.

Leo joined CLOUT early on and has been fortunate to attend all three Gatherings - National, International, and Global. Minneapolis was a profound experience for her: not just to learn Minnesotan, but because of the amazing presence of the Spirit in the gathering of all those lesbians fully embracing their faith. It was sexy; it was passionate; it was deeply moving. And it was re-experienced in California in 1993 and again two years later in Rochester.

So when the women in Portland CLOUT said they'd be willing to host the next gathering, Leo jumped at the chance to help make it happen. She wants everyone from Minnesota, California and New York to know that she expects to see you in Portland in 1997. She knows who you are, and she wants you . . . It's going to be fantastic!



CLOUT Council Members Laurie Fox and Susan Leo

CLOUT: The Verse on Chapters

by Susan Leo

CLOUT is a global movement of amazing women delighting in the miracle of being out, lesbian and Christian. There are quite a few of us, but I'm afraid that we're in no danger of becoming a voting majority in any state.

We live our lives in our scattered communities, going to work, and going to church—if we're lucky enough to have both a job and a place to worship. But we rarely see one another, and even when we do, it's not often we can connect on the spiritual level we all crave.

So, it's time for a local CLOUT chapter in your home town. It's easy, it's fun. And this is a how-to guide for growing your own, based on our experience in Portland where we have a fabulous monthly gathering of women representing just about every flavor of Christian that you can imagine. It's simple and you don't have to be Janie Spahr to make it happen!

1. Pray about it. It's a quaint first step, but it seems an appropriate one. Ask for help, pay attention, get to work.

2. Make a list. Think of all the lesbians you know who do "church stuff," who have ever done "church stuff," who are preacher's kids, who don't run screaming from the room when the word "Christian" is uttered. Dig up their addresses and write them a letter. Include a copy of the CLOUT brochure, explain what you're up to and invite them to a meeting.

3. The meeting. We have found that Saturday morning from 10:00 to noon is a great time. It's late enough to sleep in, early enough to have the rest of your day available. We make coffee but don't do food — it gets in the way. We meet faithfully, the second Saturday of every month and send out postcards to remind ourselves of the blessed event. While a home would be fine to meet in, we like to meet at a local campus ministry center: It's free and is a pleasant, large space and no one has to feel like a hostess.

4. What happens. We have a simple pattern to our meetings: an opening, a program and a closing. We plan ahead, brainstorm about what we would like to do in the coming months, and different women take responsibility for each section. There are getting-to-know exercises, songs, prayers, readings, and stuff that is as varied a lot as we are. The programs have ranged from being theological discussions on the resurrection to making collages reflecting our faith journeys. Don't be afraid to try things. Don't be boring. Remember you have come together to explore, not recite. Make time to visit but don't just schmooze, talk about your faith.

5. Plan ahead. Enlist women to take charge so that everyone "owns" the chapter. Think about having a retreat. Great things happen when given a chance. If you must miss a month due to bad weather, earthquake or a plague of locusts, pick right back up the following month — continuity is essential. Brainstorm program ideas: what do you want to learn talk about, experiment with? What rituals can you create? The liturgical year is a handy guide, but you don't have to be a slave to it. In the coming months we in Portland are going to celebrate Valentine's day, Lent (with a Taize program) and then Easter in some way . . .

6. Pass the basket. Seriously. Collect money so you can afford to do the mailings and pay for the coffee.

7. Make a list. Ask each woman who comes to add more names to the list. There are a lot of lesbians out there who are looking for a spiritual home, and a monthly CLOUT meeting can be that home for many of us. Put a CLOUT announcement in the local lesbian/gay paper; it's usually free. Talk about CLOUT!!

8. Call on Lainey Rathgeber, your scrumptious national Chapter Liaison for resources and contacts. And if you call, we will come!! We of the CLOUT Council would love to come over and play with you anytime.

Remember, CLOUT is about celebrating that lesbian Christian miracle. Create the possibility and have a great time!!

Friends of Sophia is an interdenominational group of women based on the campus of St. Thomas More College that is dedicated to nurturing Christian Feminist spirituality through educational opportunities, shared experience and liturgical celebration. FFI contact Friends of Sophia, St. Thomas More College, 1437 College Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0W6.

Presbyterian Church (USA) is inviting people to become a **"Witness for '96"** - a grassroots campaign to impact the outcome of the 1996 General Assembly in Albuquerque, NM. FFI write Jim Anderson, PLGC, PO Box 38, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-0038 and/or join in fasting and/or prayer each Wednesday

UNITED CHURCH COALITION FOR LESBIAN/GAY CONCERNS

1996 NATIONAL GATHERING

SUNDAY, JUNE 30 - WEDNESDAY, JULY 3

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

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REV. JOAN MARTIN

FFI, UCCL/GC

18 N COLLEGE STREET

ATHENS, OH 45701

1-800-653-0799

E-MAIL: AA747@SEORF.OHIOU.EDU

My partner Leslie and I spent 1995 looking for a worshipping community in Columbus, following my resignation as pastor of Spirit of the Rivers, a small, primarily lesbian/gay congregation. Leslie's and my priorities are similar: we were looking for a community that uses inclusive language, is welcoming of us as a couple, has a clear commitment to social justice, and whose people care for one another. We found none. Though we visited a number of churches more than once, and we didn't go every Sunday (some days we stayed home and grieved Spirit of the Rivers), that's a lot of churches! Perhaps you will be surprised - as I was - that the main stumbling block was not about our lesbianism, but about male language. It was very jarring to be accepted as a couple, but *not* as women. Go figure!

So for the first time in my 54 years on this planet, I am not in any way affiliated with the institutional Christian church. It's both scary and exciting. (I actually had three anxiety attacks when I resigned from a lesbian/gay caucus group - my last "official" membership with the Church.) And I am absolutely convinced that I could not have done it without CLOUT. CLOUT has been both a support community AND a standard by which I measure other faith communities. If it weren't for CLOUT I would either "settle" for accepting what the patriarchal churches have to offer, OR I would be totally separated from the tradition which I love/hate and has given me spiritual nurture since I was a babe in arms. Instead, I can wait to see what the Holy One has in store for me - if anything - in addition to my CLOUT community.

Many, many of you could tell - and have told! - similar stories of CLOUT's importance for you, with details changed. My hope for ALL of you is that if you haven't already, you will become connected to this incredible life-giving, cutting-edge movement and watch yourself step on OUT (in more ways than one)!

IN THE NEXT CLOUT reach:

1) A review of *The Grace of Coming Home: Spirituality, Sexuality, & the Struggle for Justice* by CLOUT's own Melanie Morrison (The Pilgrim Press). In the meantime, read it--it's great!!!!

2) CLOUT's Four Primary AIMS

How is CLOUT like a denim shirt? "The irregularities and variations of shading and texture are characteristic of this fabric [community], adding to its natural beauty, and are in now way to be considered defective.

(Submitted by Laurie Fox)

our individual behaviors and forms of inclusion, but the ways in which we invest, the companies from which we buy, the arts we support, the restaurants we frequent, and so on, so we can consciously carry out our anti-racism agenda where it counts, literally. For example, banking at a community-owned bank and screening investments for social responsibility are two concrete ways white women with resources can add to the anti-racist efforts already underway in our groups.

(5) The Contract with America shows that the rightwing understands that votes matter. Virginia's fifth suggestion is one I, too, support. I would want to unpack just what we mean by power and reiterate what democracy means since it is so clear that power and democracy, like everything else in this culture, can be bought and sold. Stand up, Ross Perot.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's useful analysis of kyriarchy (see her *But She Said*) as the interstructured, literally, "larded over" social, economic, political, cultural and religious structures, highlights the problem. Her biblically-based model of a "discipleship of equals" invites widespread participation and insisting on shared resources focused on both theological and political change. If religious faith compels political action, and political action is focused by religious faith, then we have our work cut out for us.

The trick, of course, is how to change the prevailing model while participating in it. My sense is that the best approach is "both/and" so that we do need lesbians in electoral politics, analogously, lesbian women ordained, so as to transform by transgressing from within and without. Since most of us only have twenty-four hours in our days, this means coalition efforts on all fronts, again often easier said than done.

Thanks to Virginia for inviting this reflection, and here's passing the pen to the next CLOUT woman who wants to add to the discussion.



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THANKYOU & PLEASE TAKE NOTE!!!!

PLEASE KNOW OUR GRATITUDE TO ALL OF YOU WHO RESPONDED TO JANIE SPAHR & CARTER HEYWARD'S LETTER. THE RESPONSE WAS GRATIFYING! (FOR A FULL REPORT, CONTACT LAURIE FOX.) FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE NOT PLEDGED AND/OR RESPONDED TO THE LETTER, PLEASE CONSIDER CONTRIBUTING \$10.00 TO COVER THE COST OF RECEIVING CLOUTreach. OR, PERHAPS YOU COULD CONTRIBUTE \$25.00 (OR MORE) TO SUBSIDIZE THE NEWSLETTER FOR ANOTHER CLOUT PERSON AND/OR SUPPORT OUR OTHER ENDEAVORS. PLEASE USE THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE - & BE GENEROUS!

Global Gathering? What Global Gathering?

Why are we calling it a "Global Gathering" when "National Gathering"/"International Gathering" sufficed up to now? As our Canadian sisters have pointed out, more than once, "National" gathering does not accurately include them. "International Gathering" crept into our consciousness in time for *most* of the Rochester publicity. And now - [drum roll, please] - the alliterative "Global Gathering" has emerged. Please be aware that a Gathering by any name will smell, taste, feel, look and sound as sweet. . . . The next Global Gathering will be in Portland in October (Columbus Day Weekend) of 1997. ALL will be welcomed, regardless of continent of origin! *[Note: the 1997 Gathering was scheduled for October by consensus of the Council.]*

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CLOUTreach

The Quarterly Newsletter for Christian Lesbians OUT Together

UNITED TO LIVE BETTER

JANUARY, 1996

BY MITZI M. EILTS

Faith Rattling* - Take one part North American Christianity - two parts liberation theology experiences in Central America and you have a recipe for a shake-ing

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We met with people, most of them women, who know they deserve so much more, deserve so much for life to be different - these are people who know that everyone deserves decent, humane living in this abundantly rich world. It is incredible to be witness to hope expressed despite or even through such struggle and suffering. Daily, I had to reexamine what I think I know/believe about God. Sometimes my faith was reaffirmed,

*The term "faith rattling" came from Shannon Grago-Snell, YDS doctoral student, member of the group. The definition is mine.



UPAVIM Leaders (plus son!)

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UNITED TO LIVE BETTER

JANUARY, 1996

BY MITZI M. EILTS

Faith Rattling* - Take one part North American Christianity - two parts liberation theology experiences in Central America and you have a recipe for a shake-ing up.

Two weeks - 14 days - is the literal amount of time I spent in Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica in January. In kairoi time, it was time enough to be changed, a forever time. And the group, also literally 14 in number, which traveled together from Yale Divinity School, was a kairoi kind of group, too. Of the 14, four of us are out lesbians, and one is an out gay man. Among us were masters' and doctoral students, a health educator, the Dean of Students and myself, a clergy-educator working with church-related higher education.

Those two weeks are coming to mean a lot to my faith as a North American Christian woman. Ever since my adolescence, the gospel as it has been witnessed to me has stood for scandal in relation to the status-quo; in worship I look to be challenged and put off balance by a Word which paradoxically both embraces and questions me. Yet even for such a believer as me, the lives, faith and conditions of Central American people took my breath away - and then helped me remember how to breathe again, more deeply.

We met with people, most of them women, who know they deserve so much more, deserve so much for life to be different - these are people who know that everyone deserves decent, humane living in this abundantly rich world. It is incredible to be witness to hope expressed despite or even through such struggle and suffering. Daily, I had to reexamine what I think I know/believe about God. Sometimes my faith was reaffirmed,

other times changed and renewed, other times lived in-between, waiting in-the-nothingness of unforgivable circumstances. That's faith rattling - faith shaken-up and rearranged. Faith, none-the-less-possible, in part because of Central Americans themselves, in part because of the faithfulness of the group with whom I traveled, and finally because of the faithful God who dared to accompany us wherever we went, wherever we may go - a God actually waiting there for us before we even decide to take the journey, waiting and wanting to lead us out of despair, rolling away the stone which closes up our tombs.

This is a God known to the poor and oppressed. This is a God known also to those of us who are women, to those of us who are lesbian. We too know this God as one who is there ahead of us, who knows and suffers with us, who cries for justice. This God who sometimes in rage,



UPAVIM Leaders (plus son!)

*The term "faith rattling" came from Shannon Grago-Snell, YDS doctoral student, member of the group. The definition is mine.

sometimes with quiet determination, rolls away the stone from the tomb in which others (as well as we ourselves sometimes) have tried to bury us. Meeting with sisters in CLOUT is another one of those places I have felt and seen this God. Telling and hearing the stories in scripture read in a liberation context is another. In the people I met in Central America, is another place where God breathes and sighs deeply.

Some stories of people we met along this kairós journey tell the truth best. May you meet them here as they met us, with respect and hospitality.

UPAVIM - Guatemala City

It was our first full day in Central America. At Casa San Jose we piled into the van - drove through a wealthy district of Guatemala City, then on to the outskirts, to the squatters' huts sitting alongside the huge garbage heaps of the city's waste.

We were headed for the barrio called Tejidos Esperanza. The community sprang up about 12 years ago as some rural Guatemalans, indigenous Mayans, fled to the city in the wake of the scorched earth campaign waged by their own government to acquire the land they occupied and farmed. Now they live in urban poverty, some working at factories where the days are long and the wages meager. So many laborers, too little work; the abuses in these largely internationally owned factories are numerous.

Down a hill we bumped our way along a rutted dirt road - shacks of weathered grey/brown plywood and used planks slapped together to make homes. Turned the corner looking into Tejidos Esperanza, the shacks here being replaced by small cement block homes. At the end of the road a three story building faced us - UPAVIM (United to Live Better), the home of a women's cooperative.

Here, with the encouragement of a retired nurse from the U.S., the women of this community have banded together. Supported through their weaving and sewing, these women run a health service, medical laboratory, well-child program, Montessori nursery school, dentistry clinic, and scholarship programs for the local primary and secondary age children. Still living in poverty, this cooperative is slowly changing the life of this neighborhood and the future for everyone here.

The women market their exquisite goods locally as well as through the U.S.A. non-profit organization, Pueblo to People. Pueblo to People has helped them acquire professional quality sewing machines so they are able to make more products from their native weaving which will sell well in the U.S.A. and to tourists. The articles, like all the artisan work in Guatemala, are incredible, breath-taking. Yet in buying from them we became aware of just how contorted a system is that they ask to be paid only \$13 U.S. dollars for a stole or vest. That's a significant amount of money towards any of the collective's programs. Thirty dollars is the difference between whether a child goes to school or not for a year. As

Gloria, our guide and mentor, said to us at one point - they have to sell their art, their culture in order to stay alive. Can we begin to dismantle a system which requires that some people sell and reshape their identity, and at the same time buy those very items - that they might live better today?

Yet, in the midst of this tension, these women have created ways together to make hope something realized, to find encouragement working with each other, to support change in circumstances for their children and the barrio itself, to help each other feel good enough about themselves to say no to abusive relationships with partners and to organize against the breakdown of their own culture. And they are feeling good; I saw it in the smiles they exchanged with one another, in the way they talked about themselves. New life is possible - and they are creating it in the face of impossible odds.

ANA MARIA Reyes & the Women of Nicaragua

The women of Nicaragua face many barriers to fullness of life - yet basic survival, food, shelter, health is the primary task for the 70% of Nicaraguan people living in poverty with inadequate or no employment. In the midst of this, these women are concerned about issues which are important to women everywhere - equal access to credit, health care for themselves and their children, the right to - and time for - education, the opportunity for some level of self realization. These women, like others of us around the world, are finding their voice, raising up their viewpoints, and organizing to meet the needs particular to women.

We met with a number of women, both middle class and poor, educated and those whose chance to become literate has once again become only a distant dream. We met women who through CEPAD's (Nicaraguan Council of Churches) loan program get small amounts, \$100 to \$1000, in order to build up the entrepreneur ventures beyond a subsistence level. These loans are making the difference between living and dying, and allowing women to work for themselves and support each other in doing so.

We met too with the women's health center movement; dealing with widespread domestic violence in the stressed environment of poverty where patriarchy becomes even worse, fighting the circumstances where abortion, cervical cancer and childbirth combined are the number one killers of women.

Urging our hosts to arrange it, we were able to visit one AIDS foundation, Nimehuatzin (Aztec, "We rise up for a noble cause"), started by a lesbian in 1986. Its building is a house in a residential neighborhood in Managua, with a beautiful carved wooden sign on the lawn declaring its existence. We learned that the number of Nicaraguans documented with HIV or AIDS is low compared to many countries, even in Central America - 240 reported in 1995. But considering the likely underreporting of the government, the cultural conditions demanding silence, and the small

DOES CLOUT'S FAITH IMPACT CULTURALISM?

by La Paula Turner

As womyn of consciousness, it is essential to view cultural diversity from many angles. We can recognize the need to address "justice" in the pursuit of cultural equality because we have and continue to strive for equality as womyn. Having made that statement, questions arise: 1) What would establish "cultural" equality? 2) Is it necessary to strive for "cultural" equality?

It is the estimation of this writer that what all people must strive for is to 1) recognize and find pride in their own culture. [Some say that white people were bought out by capitalism.] 2) Respect other peoples' cultures as equally valid [which may be hard if you've been taught that you are indeed inferior]. And 3) learn from other cultures [pause to appreciate differences].

If we could understand that society is influenced by many cultures. Cultures are influenced by groups and communities, who are influenced by the individuals who comprise them. Individuals are influenced by the weather, spirituality, heroes (male and female), illnesses, economics, disasters, proverbs, storytelling and many other dynamics.

When we look at ourselves, CLOUT, we begin to see that we have some very strong attitudes about our Christian culture. When we "gather" we find that even in our likenesses, we are extremely diverse. Culture is so imbedded in our life view, even of Christianity, that we must take one small step at a time to begin to expand our consciousness.

Meeting people with different attitudes gives us leverage for growth. Dr. Charlotte Kennedy is the Director of Intercultural Medicine at the University of Tennessee in Memphis. Most of the material used in this presentation is from her writings and courses. This, the first of three presentations, will help us to examine ATTITUDES.

According to Webster, attitude means: 1. The posture of the body in connection with an action, mood, etc. 2. A way of acting, feeling or thinking: one's disposition, mental state, etc.

We have, at least, all seen some sitcom on TV where an African-American woman of any age, size or class, says: "I don't think so, girlfriend!" while she puts her hand(s) on her hip(s) and shakes her head just so: ATTITUDE! We've all seen some move where the Caucasian "valley girl (or guy)" says: OKAAAAY, OK, like - um. . . , as she flips her wrist and bats her eyes: ATTITUDE! We've all seen or heard about Mother Teresa, Bishop Tutu, Anita Bryant, Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan and Janie Spahr. Somehow, each of these persons have had an impact on our lives; they all have "ATTITUDE." Whether we agree with them or not, their attitudes have impacted many lives. We recognize a certain

spirituality, communal consciousness and/or concern (or lack thereof) for humanity in each of the persons listed above. Each one has evidenced some impact on the consciousness of humanity either on this continent and/or others.

Now when we even think about some of the persons mentioned above, our emotions take off in directions to points unknown. We then must address our ATTITUDES. It is a challenge "to resist the temptation to 'label' persons according to condition, personal characteristic and especially behavior. When we can acknowledge that everyone has a limited view of cultural diversity and is influenced by her or his own social, cultural and family values/background,"¹ we are on the road to addressing cultural equality.

Those of us who travel extensively, begin to grow out of our nationalistic arrogance. We become consciousnessed as we experience "culture shock" and start the process of learning that everyone doesn't look at the world as we do, nor do they have to. It is not an easy process by any means. We can no longer ignore the fact even when our words are the same, our attitudes, when using those words, are very different. Our spiritual attitudes and understandings differ, our strides toward universal love take different roads. Too often we have not "resisted the temptation to regard individuals as 'good' or 'bad,' based on some social or cultural difference."²

If it were possible, could we break into small groups: regionally and locally, and try to determine for ourselves what creates our spiritual ATTITUDES (inclusive of everyone in the group)? Could we allow ourselves to just bring into the open the influences that our race, sexuality and particular religious background have had on who we are today? Can we share that and come to accept each other? If we can, we have begun the first step of recognizing our ATTITUDES about equality in culture.

¹ Intercultural Consciousness and Faith, Medicine Curriculum; Dr. Charlotte Kennedy. Assistant Professor, Director Intercultural Medicine, University of Tennessee 1995.

² *Ibid.*



La Paula Turner, CLOUT Council

("United. . ." from p. 2)

population of the country to begin with, the problem has only just begun to surface. The resources for testing, education and decent healthcare are frighteningly minimal despite the courageous efforts of this group and the medical clinic of CEPAD.

Speaking with the Nimehuatzin staff we also learned some about the gay/lesbian community. It is very closeted. The Spanish term used to identify the gay community holds hope; it is a term which means "flying with feathers/wings," but it is also known that this only occurs in the middle of the night.

And then one morning we met with a woman pastor in Nicaragua, Ana Maria Reyes. Managing to get a high school level degree in theology after all the men were drafted to help with the war effort, now she's part of a study group of eight men and two other women, completing a seminary course step by step. With her husband, she serves a local church, though people still turn to her husband first and often ask him, "How can you stand to live with a woman like that?" During the week she is running an incredible education program for the children of the Managua barrios with several other women which includes lunch program and two levels preschool as well as night study program for 12 - 18 year olds who usually work during the day. Women of the community cook the meals where they are learning how to use inexpensive soy-bean for protein.

As Ana Marie spoke with us, her wise theology of liberation came pouring out with comments like, "Individualistic churches which think personal relationship with Christ is more important than if people eat or work or learn is not the example of Christ which we see and understand. . . . There is no gospel without the cross, but I don't think God so much sent Jesus to die and suffer, but rather that the system perceived Jesus' work as scandal - it was the system which made Jesus suffer and die. . . . Our theology must be lived, incarnated. . . it must be ample, something connected to our survival and promoting life. . . . God is one who pardons and forgives. . . . Also God is one who opens a road, a way, in the sea; is with us in turbulent waters. . . . God is one who knows us even in the womb - intimately. God is not ashamed to know and be known in this way.

In the market at Masaya I found a carved stone woman - ample, smiling, flexible and strong to remind me of the women of Central America, to remind me of their dreams and visions. I call her Nica.

These are some of the stories. . . .

Grief is a familiar companion since coming home. Grieving another layer of innocence lost about the world, about evil's reality, grieving the intensity of two weeks lived just to be experienced and understood - with daily necessities arranged and taken care of (ironic juxtaposition in the context, eh?); grieving the loss of being so welcomed into strangers' lives yet coming home to the anonymity and individualness of

U.S. urban life; grieving the loss of the group itself, now dispersed and occupied with the disparate activities and loyalties of our daily lives here; grieving the loss of the intense colors of the land and culture in Central America muted to the grays of New England winter and culture. Grieving how important faith felt there; asking myself, what does that translate to here?

Thanksgiving too has arisen in me; thanks for my home, for my relationship with Jann and dear friends who want to hear and know about this trip; even thanksgiving for the suffering known in my own life, out of which and into which I can and did lean on in witnessing the suffering of Central Americans; thanksgiving for the chance to be re-evangelized. I give thanksgiving for my faith, without which I could not now stand going on, having witnessed the repression and poverty which exists there - repression and poverty predicated by my own government, international business and wealthy in the countries of Central America. Without faith I couldn't hope to keep clear my own eyes to see the repression and poverty which is only slightly more veiled but exists here in the U.S. as well.

Being re-evangelized in Central America, I know that faith means to "keep on keeping on" - in hope, and doing that *with* others whenever possible. Being re-evangelized, I know that however huge evil may be, I believe in God more. Being re-evangelized means thinking more clearly (especially about economics), loving every day more dearly, fighting more nearly the woes that suffering brings on to overwhelm the spirit/body and fighting the deadness which excess and materialism bring on for all of us who are wealthy.



*Pasqual Ortiz & Wendy Gist
Nimehuatzin Foundation*

Good Reading:

The Grace of Coming Home: Spirituality, Sexuality, & the Struggle for Justice by Melanie Morrison (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995)

Melanie Morrison states in the introduction to her book, "I am a white, lesbian, feminist, Christian minister doing her work." And very good work it is, too! In the 24 essays, addresses, meditations and sermons, she speaks boldly to "women and men - of whatever sexual orientation - who have felt alienated from the church and Christian tradition by virtue of noninclusive language, fear-based images of God, and disempowering images of humanity." Her words are empowering and life-giving, speaking of language, coming out, alienation, lesbigay rituals, humility, resurrection, and that love that will not let us go. In "Remembering Re-Imagining" she describes how CLOUT's presence at the Re-Imagining conference created a powerful holy moment as hundreds of women came forward as "out" lesbians. I am especially moved by the words in "In the Presence of My Enemies" which could be used to consecrate bread and cup. "As this bread can be broken, they can break my body. They possess the power to do that. But they cannot quench the Spirit or kill the dream of God's creation. Not if you remember. Not if you refuse to forget. Not if you resist being numbed or falling asleep. Every time you eat bread together, remember and keep the dream alive."

In "The Heart of the Matter," she responds to biblical attacks of homosexuality in one of the best ways I've experienced yet. Instead of addressing each of the often quoted scriptures that attack homosexual persons, she describes how Jesus "might respond to homosexuality." She notes that Jesus "radically reinterpreted. . . the purity codes." "I have not come to do away with the scriptures or the law, but to fulfill them." He said in effect, 'Love and justice are the central moral norms - the heart of the matter - and the

scriptures are fulfilled whenever and wherever love and justice are done." She describes how Jesus insisted that the "scripture must never be placed above persons, nor may they be used to justify human prejudice."

It would have helped me if Morrison had used "guilt" instead of "shame" in "Good Shame/Bad Shame." For me, shame implies that "I am a bad person," whereas guilt suggests that I have done something against an ethical standard.

Morrison states her appreciation for, and quotes, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Carter Heyward and Adrienne Rich. She also speaks appreciatively of CLOUT and, only partly because she's one of our founders, I recommend this book very highly.

* * * * *

In her tribute to May Sarton (*water wheel*, Fall 1995), Mary Hunt states that *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaid Singing* by Sarton "jolted me from theology to literature, from ill-fitting heterosexuality to that glove-like lesbianism that we both wore so easily, from worrying about theories to worrying about life."

* * * * *

For those with a more evangelical/conservative theology, don't miss the special issue of *The Other Side* on "Christians & Homosexuality: Dancing Toward the Light." This is a compilation of their articles on homosexuality. Copies of the booklet are available from *The Other Side*, 300 W. Apsley Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144.

* * * * *

With Open Hands: Resources for Ministries Affirming the Diversity of Human Sexuality is a journal supported by churches within various denominations who welcome lesbigay persons into full participation (3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641).

CLOUT'S FOUR PRIMARY AIMS

1. To call upon Lesbian Christians to come out of the closet, whenever and wherever possible, and to help empower one another in taking this courageous step.
2. To tell our stories and share our spiritual journeys so that we may create and embody Lesbian Christian understandings and contexts for justice-based theologies, ethics, liturgies, rituals, psychologies, recovery programs and other spiritual resources. In so doing, we partner with justice-minded sisters world-wide to further the healing and liberation of all creatures and the earth.
3. To explore new understanding of erotic power and sexuality, of mutuality, commitment, faithfulness and partnership so that we do not merely replicate or imitate sexist, heterosexist or capitalist relationships of alienation and possession.
4. To network with Jewish lesbians, postchristian lesbians and other spiritual and secular groups of lesbians; with profeminist/womanist gay men; and with pro feminist/womanist lesbian-affirming organizations, especially those of other marginalized women and men, both within and beyond the churches.

(Editor's note: These are not cast in concrete! Your comments, feedback, etc., will be gratefully appreciated.)

The first of these is the "Theology of the Cross" (Theologia Crucis) which is the central theme of the entire work. It is a study of the cross as a symbol of God's love and sacrifice for the world.

The second of these is the "Theology of the Church" (Theologia Ecclesiae) which is a study of the church as a community of believers. It is a study of the church as a body that is united to Christ and that is called to live in love and service to the world.

The third of these is the "Theology of the Kingdom" (Theologia Regni) which is a study of the kingdom of God. It is a study of the kingdom as a realm of God's rule and as a goal for the church and the world.

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from the editor/coordinator

DIANA VEZMAR-BAILEY

Leslie and I found a church! After 14 months of being without a church home, we found a congregation that welcomes us as a couple, is diverse (people of colors and sexualities), has an emphasis on social justice, and is making strides toward inclusive language.

Well, no, it isn't perfect. The theology expressed during Lent/Holy Week smacked of humanity's sinfulness, God's wonderfulness, and Jesus' willingness to be killed on the cross for our sins. Although this is widely celebrated as Christianity's basic tenets, as a recovering victim-survivor of incest, I cannot embrace a Father who sends a Son to be killed - for any reason. This is, in popular parlance, divine child abuse. For those whose primal life experience is as a victim of someone *else's* sin, this theology is death-dealing, not life-giving, in my experience.

I can recall vividly the moment that I read these words from Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (Crossroad: New York, 1984):

[The] interpretation of Jesus' death as atonement for sins is much later than is generally assumed in New Testament scholarship. The notion of atoning sacrifice does not express the Jesus movement's understanding and experience of God but is a later interpretation of the violent death of Jesus in cultic terms. The God of Jesus is not a God who demands atonement and whose wrath needs to be placated by human sacrifice or ritual.

When I first read these words, I scurried to my desk in search of my colored pens and, in the margin of that book, at that place, I inscribed technicolor stars and lightning bolts.

Fiorenza goes on to describe Jesus' radical "discipleship of equals" as the focus of his ministry. Then, as now, neither religious nor secular authorities are terribly enthusiastic about this concept. And it has given me (and many others as well) a lifeline for my spiritual life. I can, with all of my passion, follow the one who died on the cross as a consequence of his radical message of God's love for all people, and a God who grieves when anyone is hurt.

So Leslie and I are not doing handsprings because of this new community of ours. We are, however, glad to be part of a group of people who are caring of one another and moving toward an inclusive kindom. [We're *still* dropping the "g"!]

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

The Interfaith Alliance gives a national voice to those whose beliefs and values are not in lockstep with the "religious right." FFI contact Jon Paone, The Interfaith Alliance, 1511 K Street NW Suite 738, Washington, DC 20005; tialliance@intr.net <http://www.intr.net/tialliance>

CLOUT WISHES
SELISSE BERRY
(FORMER
COORDINATOR)

A HAPPY
BELATED
(APRIL 24)
40TH (!)
WITH LOVE &
CELEBRATION!!



A SHOWER OF STOLES
FROM A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Martha Juillerat & Tammy Lindahl (6146 Locust Street, Kansas City, MO 64110) are collecting stoles to display at the next national gathering of the Presbyterian Church (USA) from lesbian Presbyterians (or former Presbyterians). Contact them for further information about how to be part of this visible witness. [No creative genes necessary. . . .]

United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns
1996 National Gathering
Sunday, June 30 - Wednesday, July 3
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Speakers: Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward & Rev. Joan Martin
FFI UCCL/GC
18 N College Street
Athens, OH 45701
1-800-653-0799
e-mail: aa747@seorf.ohiou.edu

CLOUTreach is the quarterly newsletter of
Christian Lesbians OUT Together
Editor: Diana Vezmar-Bailey

NOTE: CLOUT is a movement, not an organization.
The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those
of the authors and do not necessarily reflect
the opinions of others.

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Any correspondence pertaining to CLOUT
&/or the newsletter, send to
PO Box 10062, Columbus, OH 43201
or e-mail vezmar-bailey.1@osu.edu

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Lyn, Trecia, Judy & Leslie.

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THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE: & HOW YOU CAN USE IT:

IF YOU HAVE ALREADY PLEDGED &/OR DONATED \$\$\$, YOU COULD SAVE THE ENVELOPE FOR WHEN YOU WIN THE LOTTERY & SEND CLOUT YOUR FIRST MILLION; USE IT FOR A BOOKMARK IN *THE GRACE OF COMING HOME*; SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR; GIVE IT TO A FRIEND SO SHE CAN WRITE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT CLOUT; SEND IN A CHANGE OF ADDRESS FOR YOURSELF; USE IT TO HOLD YOUR COUPONS CLIPPED FROM LAST SUNDAY'S PAPER; SEND IN YOUR IDEAS ON HOW TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS OF CLOUT (CELEBRATING THE MIRACLE OF BEING CHRISTIAN, LESBIAN & OUT).

IF YOU HAVE *NOT* PLEDGED &/OR SENT IN A DONATION, YOU COULD DO SO. \$10 COVERS THE COST OF KEEPING YOU ON THE MAILING LIST; \$25 (OR MORE) SUBSIDIZES ANOTHER CLOUT PERSON &/OR SUPPORTS OUR OTHER PROGRAMS.

PLEASE USE THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE - & BE GENEROUS!

CLUB COUNCIL

REGIONAL COUNCILS

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THE COUNCIL BY-LAWS - A NEW PUBLICATION

In the past, many clubs have had their own set of by-laws. This publication is a guide for clubs to use as a model for their own by-laws. It is a comprehensive guide that covers all the essential elements of a club's by-laws. It is a valuable resource for clubs that are looking to update their by-laws or create new ones. The publication is available for purchase from the National Council of the Arts and Sciences.

For more information, please contact the National Council of the Arts and Sciences at 1234 Main Street, Suite 500, Columbus, OH 43201. Phone: 614-555-1234. Email: info@ncas.org

Getting to Know You: CLOUT Council Member Kyle Cooper

I met both of my girlfriends in church! You might ask, "How did that happen"?!!

My background was quite conservative. I was one of those people who just wanted to "do the right thing." Pleasing my father seemed to be my lifelong goal.

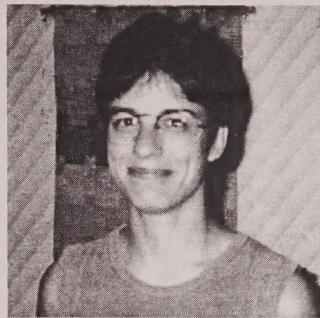
I dated several men during and after college, all of whom were acceptable to my parents, until talk of marriage began. Nightmares about married life led to breakups. Medical school was a welcome escape. It seemed that I had time for little else through my residency in Vermont.

I felt that my life was too busy for organized religion. If I had the time, my Sunday mornings were spent with the New York Times and Charles Kuralt. When my father was terminally ill, I went back to a small Presbyterian church. The church had become a "More Light" church in 1986 because it was the right thing to do, and not because there were known gay and lesbian members at that time. There I fell in love with Alice who happened to be married to Al. We promptly informed the church community who shared their pain and joy with us. This is the stuff of a lesbian novel, but true it is. Four months after Alice moved in with me, she was diagnosed with a recurrence of breast cancer with liver and lung involvement. In her final days, one and a half years later, Al and Mary, one of Alice's friends at work, a lesbian, and now my best friend, helped me care for Alice. The church took care of all of our other needs (meals, prayers, leaf raking, etc.). At this point I was "out" at church, but nowhere else. I felt that the only safe place was with my church community. One year later, Janie Spahr came to town and facilitated my coming out to the larger community. No question about it; my picture was in the paper.

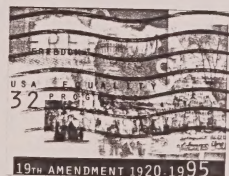
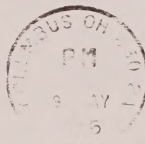
Nine months later, I met my partner Carol in church. She didn't stand a chance. In March, we moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I am "out" to my medical practice, my family, and to anyone who wants to know.

When I heard about CLOUT, I wanted so much to become involved. My life as an "out" lesbian Christian has been so rich and exciting. My experience instills in me the belief that God delights in the true and honest me. This experience was magnified at the Global Gathering of CLOUT in August of 1995. Such wonderful and remarkable women in my presence, and I could count myself part of them and of the movement.

Fund raising is a new and uncomfortable role for me. Still, the future of CLOUT is dependent on money, so I will take this opportunity to plug for more of your hard-earned dollars to perpetuate this life-sustaining effort.



CLOUT
PO BOX 10062
COLUMBUS, OH 43201



La Paula Turner
CLOUT Council
279 N. McNeil Street
Memphis TN 38112

Gay, Lesbian, and CLOUT Christian: Our Treasure

John McNeill, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott,
LaPaula Turner, Scott Anderson, Robert Raines

June 6-9



We've found a treasure, not made of gold, but of our very souls; living life as faith-filled lesbians and gay men, persons whom God created. The political arena and the governing powers of many churches contend that we have no treasure or that we should bury it. Rejoice - - this weekend is an opportunity to honor the treasure, to accept our faith as a pearl of great price, to rededicate ourselves to doing right in a world with many injustices, to love goodness in all creation, and to walk humbly with our God.

This 20th annual event for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals of all colors, their families and friends, will continue to explore issues of sexuality in the context of Christian faith and practice. The process includes daily worship, small group sharing, workshops, play, and celebration. We combine support for our personal journeys with encouragement from the scriptural, theological, ethical, and political work of our presenters.

Each year we build a les/bi/gay church on the mountain. It is a community of tears and laughter, healing and empowerment, love and joy, a community empowered to choose life.

Led by: **John McNeill**, Catholic priest, psychotherapist, co-founder of Dignity, and author of several books including *Freedom, Glorious Freedom*; **Virginia Ramey Mollenkott**, feminist theologian, board member of the Center for Sexuality and Religion, and author of *Sensuous Spirituality*; **Rev. LaPaula Turner**, African American pastor in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, Program chair of Christian Lesbians Out Together (CLOUT); **Scott Anderson**, former Presbyterian pastor, now staff with the California Council of Churches and serving on the national board of Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns. **Robert Raines**, former Kirkridge Director, will join the 20th anniversary celebration of gay and lesbian programming at Kirkridge during the weekend.

6:45 p.m. Thursday dinner through
Sunday lunch.

\$295 (\$150 registration deposit).

Kirkridge is a mountain retreat center in Eastern Pennsylvania, 85 miles from New York City and Philadelphia. Since 1942 Kirkridge has welcomed pilgrims seeking personal and social transformation.



KIRKRIDGE

Telephone (610) 588-1793

Registration Form

Please register two weeks prior to the event if possible.
Print clearly and use one form per person/event.

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please list the phone number(s) where you can most readily be reached:

Home Phone: () _____ Work Phone: () _____ Other () _____

Female ☐ Male ☐ Roommate request (all rooms are double): _____

Name of Event: _____ Date of Event: _____

\$ _____ Registration Deposit

Mail this form and registration deposit to: Kirkridge, Bangor, PA 18013-9359

\$ _____ Tax-deductible gift for
scholarship assistance

The balance of event fee is due upon your arrival at Kirkridge.

If you cancel for any reason, your registration deposit will be refunded (except for a '20 processing fee) only if you notify Kirkridge at least 14 days before the event.

